

SECURE VACANT BUILDINGS

City of St. Louis Sustainable Neighborhood Initiative



Closed Church's Chicken in Delmar Loop Painted by Peter Wollaege

DESCRIPTION

St. Louis has many vacant buildings that are assets waiting to be tapped, but these buildings can also be a burden on their surrounding communities. Buildings with historic features or unique design elements add character and charm to a neighborhood, but if they are vacant and in disrepair, they can be unsafe and unsightly, and can encourage crime that leads to further decay, declining property values, and a decrease in neighborhood morale and vibrancy. Working with the City to board up buildings and maintaining the properties' lawns can increase safety, preserve the structures, and reduce the negative effects that vacancy can have on the neighborhood.

NEIGHBORHOOD BENEFITS

Environmental

- Improved safety with more secure and structurally sound buildings
- Ability to recycle building materials
- Reduced blighted buildings and possibility for enriching public art

Social

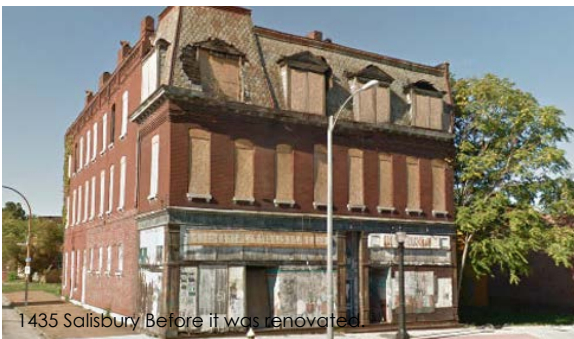
- Reduced crime and increased safety
- Improved sense of place and ownership in the community
- Preserved historic character of neighborhoods

Economic

- Local residents are trained in construction, community preservation, and building safety
- Stabilized property values from a decrease in blighted properties



Vacant Building Board Up Day in Old North St. Louis



1435 Salisbury Before it was renovated

RELATED TOOLS

When paired with other tools, securing vacant buildings can contribute to a greater and more holistic, sustainable neighborhood. Think about community cohesion, public art, local prosperity, public safety, and healthy vibrant communities. Try combining this tool with:

- **Develop a Neighborhood Sustainability Asset Inventory**
- **Create Public Art Installations or Exhibits**
- **Paint Intersections or Buildings Murals**
- **Conduct a Weatherization Training Program**

EXAMPLES

Problem Properties Task Force, St. Louis, MO

Collaborative practice between city and volunteer lawyers to get owners to clean up rundown properties. Can be implemented in any neighborhood.

Do It Yourself Blight Busting, Detroit, MI

Local volunteers work to board up vacant buildings and clean vacant lots.



'Obama Wall' on Cherokee Street St. Louis featuring artworks from various local artists.

GET STARTED

1. **Reach Out** Engage your **Neighborhood Stabilization Office** and the **St. Louis Problem Properties Task Force**. The program targets owners of run-down properties or properties with a lot of nuisance crimes. Owners either clean up their properties or face lawsuits or jail time. Private lawyers working for free are available to represent neighborhoods that want problem properties cleaned up.
2. **Create** Creating public art for abandoned buildings can beautify the neighborhood, address building safety issues, preserve buildings for later rehab, and engage the public. Murals on storefronts, boarded windows, and panels attached to building facades create a lively and energetic street. Work with your **Neighborhood Stabilization Officer** to have boards cut to size and delivered for use in your project. Examples of public art engaging or addressing the issues of abandoned buildings include:
 - **Paint the Ply** - paint the plywood on vacant buildings with artistic designs
 - Paint Murals on Buildings - **Philly Paint**, **Abandoned Church**, **Detroit Demolition Disneyland**, **The Living Wall**, **Tacoma fight blight with art**, **Building Sculptures**.
3. **Engage** Create a public input campaign or installation that encourages the public to get input about the future of the building or neighborhood while securing or increasing safety on the vacant property. Examples include:
 - <http://iwishthiswas.cc/>
 - <http://candychang.com/looking-for-love-again/>
 - <http://candychang.com/community-chalkboards/>
 - <http://candychang.com/before-i-die-in-nola/>
4. **Prevent** Innovate creative ways to stop violations of building and historic codes by collaborating with the **Citizens Service Bureau** to alert City officials to unapproved alterations, dumping, brick theft and illegal demolition. Work with local art and community building programs such as the **Affordable Housing Commission**, **Rebuild Foundation**, **Community Builders Network**, **UMSL Community Partnership Project**, and **Kresge Foundation** to find resources to support community preservation and community arts. Also, see the film **Brick By Chance and Fortune** for more information.
5. **Document** Catalog vacant properties available for redevelopment - a map of assets - by engaging residents, youth, and volunteers, to document vacant and/or historic buildings and to promote the advantages available (historic tax credits, tax abatement) for the rehabilitation of historic buildings. Share the information online, through social media, through your neighborhood or local business association, or as a brochure or printed report.



RELATED SUSTAINABILITY PLAN CATEGORIES

This tool supports the following goals and strategies:

Urban Character, Vitality & Ecology

Strategies B7-Encourage communities to improve their own neighborhood; F1-Preserve and reuse buildings as a means of achieving sustainability; F4-Protect historic residential and commercial properties vulnerable to foreclosure, tax forfeiture, or demolition; F5-Promote redevelopment of historic homes and commercial properties; F6-Prevent scavenging of bricks, metals, and other materials from vacant buildings; F8-Promote public engagement in the historic preservation movement; G5-Promote neighborhood stabilization efforts; G6-Experiment with new ways to raise funds and build partnerships to build sustainable and affordable housing; H6-Maintain appearance of vacant land and abandoned properties; H8-Enhance community cleaning and beautification efforts.

Arts, Culture & Innovation

Strategies: A3-Include youth development and education within art and culture projects and programs; E1-Use distinctive public art, architecture, landscape, and streetscape to build city and neighborhood identity; E4-Use temporary public art projects and programs to revitalize underutilized city areas.

Education, Training & Leadership

Strategies: E1-Educate and empower citizens in methods of being environmentally sustainable.

Prosperity, Opportunity & Employment

Strategies: C1-Reuse existing buildings for inexpensive incubation of entrepreneurial ideas.

For the most current examples, updated tools, and information, visit the City's Sustainable Neighborhood Initiative website:

SUSTAINABLENEIGHBORHOOD.NET